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# Exploring Varieties of (post)Soviet Urbanization: Reconciling the General and Particular in post-Socialist Urban Studies

IRINA FROST

## Abstract

Urban studies that developed in the post-socialist context seek to reappraise the very notion of the post-socialist city and to reconceptualise their urban practices as a result of the changed regime and economic mode of production. While acknowledging the necessity to develop urban theory in more coherent but at the same time multipolar and comparative directions, the cities with socialist past as a potential source for the theorization of urbanity are poorly considered nonetheless. The paper argues for more nuanced and more detailed analysis of (post) socialist modes and forms of urbanization, looking at post-socialist urban studies as a multidimensional field of research. This can be handled, firstly, through careful consideration of the historical context and, secondly, by conducting a comparative analysis of post-socialist cities. Set against this background the paper aims to problematize the urbanization experience undertaken during the Soviet period as the long-lasting large-scale project of socialist ideology which has far-reaching consequences for urbanization patterns long after the collapse of the USSR. Yet it is inaccurate to see Soviet urbanization as homogeneous while all its outcomes as uniform and monolithic. (Post)Soviet cities present rich and insightful material for the comparative study of both post-socialist urban patterns and urban experiences in the context of clashing of capitalist and post-socialist tendencies. The paper calls to see beyond the assumption about the egalitarian landscape of economic geography as a spatial ideology of the Soviet regime and to research the varieties of post-Soviet urbanization which provide us with a valuable opportunity to develop a new conceptual vocabulary for the analysis of diverse urbanization processes.

*USSR; urbanization; socialism; post-socialism; urban theory; socialist city*

## Zusammenfassung

### Die Erforschung der Vielfalt (post-)sowjetischer Urbanisierung: Die Versöhnung des Allgemeinen und des Besonderen in der postsozialistischen Urbanistik

Die Urbanistik, die sich im postsozialistischen Kontext entwickelt hat, versucht aufgrund des veränderten Regimes und einer neuen wirtschaftlichen Produktionsweise den Begriff der postsozialistischen Stadt neu zu bewerten und ihr Konzept von urbanen Praktiken neu zu definieren. Während sie die Notwendigkeit anerkennt, die urbane Theorie in eine kohärentere, aber gleichzeitig auch mehrpolige und komparative Richtung weiterzuentwickeln, werden die Städte mit sozialistischer Vergangenheit als potenzielle Quelle für die Theoretisierung der Urbanität dennoch kaum berücksichtigt. Der Beitrag plädiert für eine differenziertere und ausführlichere Analyse der (post-)sozialistischen Formen der Urbanisierung und berücksichtigt dabei die postsozialistische Urbanistik als einen Forschungsbereich mit vielen unterschiedlichen Dimensionen. Dies kann erstens durch sorgfältige Berücksichtigung des historischen Kontexts und zweitens durch eine Vergleichsanalyse der postsozialistischen Städte erreicht werden. Vor diesem Hintergrund beabsichtigt der Beitrag, die Erfahrungen im Bereich Urbanisierung während der Sowjetzeit als ein nachhaltiges und großangelegtes Projekt sozialistischer Ideologie zu problematisieren, das auch noch lange nach dem Zusammenbruch der UdSSR weitreichende Folgen für Urbanisierungsmodelle hat. Dennoch ist es falsch, die sowjetische Urbanisierung als homogen oder alle ihre Auswirkungen als einheitlich und monolithisch anzusehen. Die (post-)sowjetischen Städte liefern für Vergleichsstudien zu postsozialistischen urbanen Modellen und urbanen Erfahrungen im Kontext des Zusammenpralls des Kapitalismus und postsozialistischer Tendenzen ergiebige und aufschlussreiche Anschauungsmaterial. Der Beitrag fordert dazu auf, alle Annahmen von einer egalitären Landschaft der Wirtschaftsgeographie als räumliche Ideologie des sowjetischen Regimes hinter sich zu lassen und die Vielfalt der postsowjetischen Urbanisierung zu erforschen, die uns eine wertvolle Gelegenheit gibt, ein neues konzeptuelles Vokabular für die Analyse diverser Urbanisierungsprozesse zu entwickeln.

*UdSSR; Urbanisierung; Sozialismus; Postsozialismus; urbane Theorie; sozialistische Stadt*

## Introduction

The collapse of the socialist regime in 1989–1991 gave a new impulse to the development of such research field as post-socialist urban studies. These studies are very diverse both in terms of their geography and the processes they analyse (these are the processes both within and between urban areas). Nevertheless, all these studies touch upon one crucial question of how the nature of the city and urbanity was affected by the profound changes in political regime and economic mode of production (e.g., STANILOV 2007; TSENKOVA and NEDOVIC-BUDIC 2006; STANILOV and SÝKORA 2014; BRADE and NEUGEBAUER 2017). Thus, the general purpose of post-socialist urban studies is to investigate to what extent urban practices could be explained by the impact of different political and economic regimes and how changes in political regimes influence urban practices. Assuming that post-socialist cities are significantly different from their Western counterparts, regarded as capitalist cities in their “pure” form, the research of the former is able to bring new insights into contemporary urban studies. Cities with socialist past are characterized by hybridity of socialist and capitalist elements resulting from internal post-socialist divergence and convergence of the paths they take in their development towards capitalism.

Hitherto, the post-socialist cities are “the grey area” of urban studies regarding their self-identity. To some extent, post-socialist cities can be considered as unique since they have been going through “multiple transformations” triggered by the collapse of the communist ideology (SÝKORA and BUZAROVSKY 2012). Nevertheless, the position of the so-called “second (urban) world” in contemporary urban studies is uncertain. As FERENČUHOVÁ and GENTILE (2017) point out, several scholars share the perception that post-socialist cities are poorly visible in the urban studies literature. The role and self-identification of post-socialist urban space are “dissolved” between or outside the globally conceptualized North and South. So far, as post-socialist urban

studies have been trying to establish their position within the urban theory, they have mainly been importing ideas and concepts from the main body of urban research rather than exporting them (SJÖBERG 2014).

Recently, post-socialist urban studies have made a remarkable qualitative leap towards conceptualisation and critical rethinking of cities with socialist past (e.g., SÝKORA and BOUZAROVSKI 2012; GOLUBCHIKOV 2016; HIRT et al. 2016; WIEST 2012). However, the ever-growing body of research on (re)conceptualisation of post-socialist cities gives us an impression that these studies take a somewhat ambiguous stance. On the one hand, they endeavour to integrate into theories of capitalism or uneven development (GOLUBCHIKOV et al. 2014; MUSIL 2005). Though on the other hand, they try to analyse the notion of the post-socialist city as independent and unique (TUVIKENE 2016; HIRT 2013; HAASE et al. 2016).

Despite the debates on the ongoing transformations of post-socialist cities, many issues and aspects of post-socialist urban development have not attracted sufficient scholarly attention so far. I will point out only a few of them as a path for further analysis. Firstly, the geography of post-socialist urban studies is quite selective: a significant amount of research focuses on cities of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) (e.g., ECKRADT 2005; TSENKOVA and NEDOVIC-BUDIC 2006), while the Former Soviet Union states (FSU) are implicitly left behind. Indeed, from a broad perspective, post-socialist urban studies embrace the so-called former Socialist Block. This block is conventionally divided into CEE and FSU states, with the CEE states being relatively well explored while the FSU countries are usually thought of as a kind of homogeneous block (with the exception of the Baltic states). Meanwhile, there is still a lack of thorough scholarly work on the variety of Soviet and post-Soviet urbanization among the FSU states as distinct cases of (post)socialism.

Secondly, a significant part of post-socialist urban research is focused on the capital cities such as Prague, Budapest,

Sofia, Warsaw, Moscow and capitals of the Baltic states (e.g., HIRT and STANILOV, 2007; OUŘEDNÍČEK and TEMILOVA 2009; BADIYINA and GOLUBCHIKOV 2005; TUVIKENE 2016). These cities have come to be regarded as “iconic cities” of post-socialism (MARCINČZAK 2007). SÝKORA and BOUZAROVSKI (2012, p. 44) explain this trend by pointing out that “a focus on those (*capital*) cities and urban processes which are moving the frontier is justified by their key role in society.” Meanwhile, non-capital post-socialist cities have received considerably less attention. Taking into account that socialist urbanization was very rapid and was driven by the construction of new industrial cities, I argue that these so-called “pure” socialist cities, which built under the socialist regime, would provide urban studies with new perspectives on the conceptualisation of urban practices within the post-socialist space.

Thirdly, a significant amount of post-socialist urban research is concentrated on the analysis of internal urban geography, considering cities as mere collections of material objects and specific/single processes, such as gentrification and suburbanization (SZELENYI 1996; HIRT 2013; STANILOV and SÝKORA 2014; BADIYINA and GOLUBCHIKOV 2005). Another matter that deserves a closer look is the external urban geography of post-socialist cities, in particular, the transformation of the centrally planned system of cities at the supra-national level under the globalization, the mutual influence between city systems of post-socialist states, especially the FSU states. At present, this issue remains poorly investigated. However, the analysis of external aspects of urbanization, that is, inter-urban relations in the globalized world, has acquired a new meaning due to the emergence of the worldwide urban hierarchy and the global economic forces that drive it (PECK 2014).

In their current phase of development, post-socialist urban studies can be defined as an open multidimensional field of research on cities profoundly affected by the changing political and economic conditions. This paper aims to problematize

the urbanization experience of the Soviet period, which resulted from the long-lasting large-scale socialist ideological agenda. This experience has also had a far-reaching impact on the contemporary urbanization patterns. I argue that the (post)Soviet urban experiment as a case study of (post)socialist urban studies requires more in-depth empirical investigation and broader critical assessment: it will help us reveal the varieties of socialist and post-socialist urbanization and address the question about the place of cities with socialist past in urban theory.

In what follows, I first discuss the necessity and the possibility of “de-westernizing” contemporary urban theory. I specifically address the question how this “de-westernization” can reshape post-socialist urban studies. I further argue that post-Soviet urbanization in many respects is a continuation of socialist urbanization, it retains similar pattern. I consider alternative arguments and challenge current opinion on the matter. I demonstrate how the study of the history of Soviet urbanization can lead to better understanding of the post-Soviet urban reality. In the next two sections, I investigate the varieties of Soviet urbanization and its consequences in the post-Soviet period as well as the diverse urban trajectories connected with each other through geographical, political and economic ties. Then I problematize the (post)Soviet urban experience as a source of urban theory.

### Post-socialist urban studies and “de-westernization” of urban theory

Urban theory aims to conceptualize human urbanization experience. Currently existing theories, however, appear to be divided and controversial since there is no general agreement about how cities should be conceptualized and studied (WALKER 2016; SCOTT and STORPER 2014). No theory has managed to provide a comprehensive description of the modern city, and “no single theory suffices to account for the variegated nature of urbanization and cities across the world” (LEITNER and SHEPPARD 2016, p. 228).

There are heated scientific debates on what constitutes urbanization and urban practices and how to analyse it (e.g., see SCOTT and STORPER 2014; ROY 2009; PECK 2014; BRENNER and SCHMID 2015; ROBINSON 2016). On the one hand, there is a research agenda to create a universal generalized approach to urban analysis. For example, a reconceptualization of the hypothesis of planetary urbanization that was introduced by LEFEBVRE (2003/1970) and significantly advanced by BRENNER and SCHMID (2012) calls for the profound revaluation of spatial patterns of urbanization. It might help to investigate and to understand the emergent transformation of urban life and their implications for conditions, territorial organization, politics, ecology, everyday life and struggle (BRENNER 2017). This concept has engendered considerable criticism because the concept of ‘planetary urbanization’ presents urbanization as homogenous and universal, thus ignoring its inherent diversity and complexity (WALKER 2015; SHAW 2015). BRENNER, however, asserts that this concept, on the contrary, is about “variegated, uneven, volatile and emergent” urban experience around the world (BRENNER 2017, p. 2). On the other hand, some scholars argue for the necessity to create a new theoretical foundation for urban studies. The theoretical framework proposed by Scott and Storper maintains that each city can be understood in the light of (*only*) two processes, namely “the dynamics of agglomeration” and “the unfolding of an associated nexus of locations, land uses, and human interactions” (SCOTT and STORPER 2014). Furthermore, Richard Walker argues that these two parameters are insufficient and adds two other essential elements: the spatial concentration of economic surplus by ruling classes and states and the creation of a built environment or urban landscape (WALKER 2016, p. 164). This line of urban theorization, being the opposite to the idea of planetary urbanization, apparently does not reject the plurality of conceptualization and analytical perspectives which can be applied to the urban nature. This approach,

however, is too rigid and materialistic to provide a comprehensive conceptualization of urban development.

There is a significant body of research that discusses the internal form and specificity of (post)socialist cities and their differences from capitalist cities (e.g., SZELENYI, 1996; HIRT 2013; TSENKOVA and NEDOVIC-BUDIC 2006). These studies, however, demonstrate a profoundly different logic of (post)socialist urban development, especially those differences that stem from the central planning approach and the state ownership of land. Nevertheless, there is a lack of theoretical conceptualisation of (post)socialist urban practices and their incorporation into the “planetary urban turn.” So far, the crucial question of post-socialist urban studies has not been answered: “Assuming there was a socialist city, is there a post-socialist one?” (HIRT 2013, S35). Moreover, urban agglomerations that emerged during the Soviet period and were oriented towards the needs of the planned economy had to follow a different internal logic from that of classical capitalist urban agglomerations, even if the general aspects of agglomeration economy (the specialized pool of labor, development of specialized knowledge base, and inter-firm knowledge spillover) were the same. Although the Soviet geographical school has its own approach to the analysis of urban agglomerations and spatial organization of productive forces (e.g., POLYAN 2014; LAPPO 2012), it has equally failed to provide a critical comparison of the logic of urban development under different political regimes and economic mode of production.

Meanwhile, along with the classical Western theories of urban development, there emerge strong voices questioning the very nature of the “western” urban theories and striving to look at the city from a different perspective – “from the outside” (ROBINSON 2016; ROY 2009). This scientific trend is closely related to comparative urbanism and postcolonial understanding of the city. It presents a critical alternative view of the city and responds to the real dynamic of the geography of urbanization. The postcolonial



approach has proven to be productive for the conceptualization of post-socialist cities: it raises such questions as to how the collapse of the communist regime affected the worldwide urbanization and how the post-socialist city as distinctly different from the capitalist city could be conceptualized. STENNING and HÖRSCHELMANN (2008) have proposed to combine post-socialist analysis with post-colonial ideas. Among other things, they argue that post-socialism should be explored in the context of pre-socialism, socialism, and post-socialism and that the socialist past and the post-socialist present should be reconsidered critically with the latter being not a linear but a complex, multi-level process (STENNING and HÖRSCHELMANN 2008). Such approach considerably enriches the theoretical aspect of post-socialism as a concept (STENNING and HÖRSCHELMANN 2008). FERENČUHOVÁ (2016) also argues that in order to better conceptualize the post-socialist cities, their examination should rely more on the historical material (HIRT et al. 2016). Parallel with the necessity to include historical perspectives in the conceptualization of post-socialist cities, some studies emphasize the need for comparative analysis in post-socialist urban research. As Karin WIEST (2012, p. 829) argues, “there is a need to widen the research agenda on post-socialist cities in order to raise consciousness for implicit comparison with Western experience, to address the global interconnectedness of the urban experience, and to call the reification of the post-socialist city as the basic entity for comparison into question.” Tauri TUVIKENE (2016) critically reassesses the study of post-socialist cities in the light of comparative urbanism and considers the post-socialist city “as a container, as a condition and as a de-territorialized concept,” that is, defining post-socialism not as a characteristic of an entire city but as a characteristic of a particular phenomenon or a process within it.

To analyze the impact of the socialism on the evolution of urbanization and urban patterns it is essential to distinguish socialism as a system of government and

socialism as a system of ideas proposed by Karl Marx. Although the socialist system of government proclaimed socialism as its official ideology, it did not follow the principles of social equality, freedom, and justice in real life. Thus, in post-socialist countries, there can be a biased attitude towards socialism as a social regime/ideology due to the fact that the practical implementation of socialist ideas considerably distorted Marx’s ideas. The problem of the duality of socialism was addressed by MURRAY and SZELENYI (1984), who reviewed different patterns of urban development under socialism. Authors, trying to conceptualize the question “is socialism pro or anti-urban?” noted that “socialist theory is pro-urban but socialist practices appear to be rather “anti-urban”. This duality of socialism as a system of ideas and as a system of government makes it necessary to clarify the meaning of the “socialist city” concept. In my view, socialist urbanization experience had little in common with socialist ideology. The socialist practice distorted socialist ideas, in particular, the idea of social and economic equality. Thus, instead of providing everybody with “equal” opportunities across the country’s geographical space, cities were turned into an ideological tool of the centrally planned economy. In light of this, it is interesting to consider the duality of socialism by drawing a comparison of capitalist cities as reflections of capitalism. Taking into account that at the moment many studies focus on the conceptualization of the post-socialist city/urbanization, I believe that first, it is necessary to conceptualize the socialist city and its hybrid nature with caution and thoroughness. Even though it is obvious that socialism as a system of ideas is utopian, the “ideal” socialist city is certainly not the socialist city of the CEE and Soviet reality. The analysis of (post)socialist urban literature has shown, however, that so far, the socialist city as a scientific concept has remained a compilation of various urban processes and material objects that were found in different societal and cultural contexts originating in the non-capitalist mode of

production. At the moment, the concept of the post-socialist city combines the blurry socialist history – an issue which still requires further exploration in the context of urbanization – and these cities’ embeddedness into capitalist reality.

In line with these arguments, I consider the recent critical debate on “de-westernization” of urban theory as a call to encourage the dialogue between various scientific schools, which stand in opposition to “western” urban theory. I argue that our studies of post-socialist cities, which have so far have been “excluded” from the global urban theorizing (TUVIKENE 2016; HAASE et al. 2016), need to be incorporated into more general debates on the urbanizing world. Meanwhile, it is essential to include historical aspects of socialist urbanization into the post-socialist urban analysis.

### Positioning post-Soviet cities in post-socialist urban studies

Post-socialist urban studies encompass cities from the former Communist Bloc (Soviet Bloc or Eastern Bloc), which are implicitly divided into two groups, namely CEE and FSU states. Apart from other differences, these groups of states had a different experience of the Communist regime. Moreover, the lengths of the time these countries were under Communist rule also differed. Nevertheless, analysis of research on post-socialist urban studies has revealed that so far, these two apparently different parts of the Communist Block are considered together. Hitherto it is not clear to what extent the processes in these two parts of the post-socialist space were similar or different from each other. Even if at one stage of their development these countries shared political and economic socialist imperatives and were opposed to the Western world, the paths of their urban development varied considerably. MUSIL (2005) emphasizes the fundamental difference that existed between the USSR and the “new” socialist countries, which stemmed from their inherited national city systems, length of the Communist period, and the ideological approaches to cities.

Recent empirical research has proven that urban development in post-socialist countries follows diverse paths, which, according to SONIA HIRT, leads to “the emergence of urban sub-types and, therefore, challenges the very idea that the post-socialist city is a meaningful term” (HIRT 2013, p. S37). While agreeing with this view, I also believe that the varieties of post-socialist cities remain largely unexplored so far. Thus, we are still on the way to conceptualizing the nature of the post-socialist city. Nevertheless, it should be stressed that at the current stage of post-socialist urban studies, the research on post-socialist cities is imbalanced: while there is a wide range of empirical research on CEE cities, there are significantly fewer studies on FSU cities. For example, in the book “Paths of Transition” edited by FRANK ECKRADT (2005), only one chapter is dedicated to the Ukrainian experience of urban transformation. Another famous book “The Post-Socialist City” edited by KIRIL STANILOV pays much attention to the research on CEE cities, leaving unaddressed FSU cities, except for the Russian experience of Moscow and several Siberian cities. STENNING and HÖRSCHELMANN (2008, p. 321) justly observe that even if distinctions between the FSU and the CEE states are commonly seen, “this diversity is rarely randomly patterned (and I would add that this sub-internal diversity is so far unpatterned) and rarely celebrated.” Moreover, distinguishing between CEE and FSU cities, I would suppose that it was the FSU part (perhaps with the exception of Baltic states) that experienced the deepest influence of socialist regime, while the CEE remained “a forgotten part of the west” (STENNING and HÖRSCHELMANN 2008, p. 319).

The imbalance of research on post-socialist urban development is visible not only in the geographical context, but also as far as the city types are concerned since most scholarly attention is focused on specific metropolitan areas, such as Prague, Warsaw, Sofia, Budapest, and Moscow. These cities serve as the prime sources of knowledge about multiple urban transformations. They used to be the

centres of the countries with abundant pre-socialist past and, after the collapse of the Communist regime, faced such processes as gentrification, suburbanization and profound transformation of the real-estate market (e.g., BADIYINA and GOLUBCHIKOV 2005; OUŘEDNÍČEK and TEMELOVA 2009; KOVÁCS 1998; SALUKVADZE and GOLUBCHIKOV 2016). Meanwhile, what I would call “pure” socialist cities, which emerged in the Soviet period, are often left outside the research focus. However, it was these new cities that were the actual product of socialist ideology and instrumentalized nodes in the integrated system of the Soviet economic model. These socialist cities experienced dramatic transformations in the transitional period as their future in the capitalist system was cardinally different from their socialist past. Although all socialist countries had cities of this type, within the Soviet space, they were integrated into one economic system. After the collapse of the USSR, this system was also destroyed, which made the future of these cities extremely uncertain.

The Soviet practice of centrally planned urbanization was unique as it was implemented in one of the biggest countries in the world in a relatively short period of time, which makes those socialist cities that were constructed as a part of this project particularly interesting for analysis. Undoubtedly, Soviet urbanization had a lot in common with the practice of socialist urbanization in CEE states, but the differences in urbanization patterns between these two parts of the former Communist Block have not been thoroughly explored so far. In this paper, I argue that the ongoing debates about the conceptualization of post-socialist urban studies should include not only direct comparison of Eastern post-socialist and Western capitalist cities but also the comparison of post-socialist cities. Following this idea, (post)Soviet urbanization occupies a peculiar position within post-socialist studies. On the one hand, (post)Soviet urbanization can be considered as a case-study of post-socialist urban studies. On the other hand, the variety of internal

(post)Soviet urban practices requires more scholarly attention. This approach will enrich our knowledge about urban practices within the normative egalitarian construct.

### Varieties of Soviet urbanization

Soviet ideology, like any other political ideology and economic system, strove to appropriate space to its own need and reconstruct the existing patterns to its own image (GOLUBCHIKOV et al. 2014, p. 619 with the reference to LEFEBVRE 1974/1991). The Soviet regime implemented a long-lasting urban agenda, which was unparalleled in its scale, scope, and impact on the evolution of urbanization, even after the regime collapsed. Soviet urbanization can be characterized as centrally planned, politicized, and forcefully accelerated; it served the needs of industrialization and resource-oriented economy and to a greater extent was meant for window-dressing rather than for inciting a profound and sustained change (e.g., see MURRAY and SZELENYI 1984; SJÖBERG 1999; PIVOVAROV 2001). All these characteristics were interdependent.

Soviet urbanization was determined by five-year and annual plans, which allocated state resources and were in a paradoxical way separated from the urban planning practices (BLIZNAKOV 1976). Priority was given to the production (industrial expansion) rather than to urban planning (TAUBMAN 1973). Nevertheless, the official data on the dynamic of the urbanization rate in the Soviet period gives the impression that the USSR made a breakthrough transforming from the rural into the highly urbanized state. Thus, the official level of urbanization in the USSR in 1922 was only 16 %, but in 1991 it reached 66 % (GOSSTAT 1973; BOLDIREV 1990). The number of cities grew from 719 to 2,190 in 1928 and 1989 correspondingly (GOSSTAT 1973; BOLDIREV 1990). The number of “urban-type settlements” (in Russian *poselki gorodskogo tipa*) increased substantially from 415 to 4,026 in 1928 and 1989 correspondingly (GOSSTAT 1973, BOLDIREV 1990).

According to official statistics, by the end of the Soviet period, the USSR had become a highly-urbanized space with an expansive city system. Urbanization, however, does not merely refer to the percentage of people living in administratively defined cities, which is especially relevant for Soviet urbanization, when the growth of urban population was primarily driven by the intense rural-urban migration (LAPPO 2012; NEFEDOVA et al. 2016). Urbanization is known to be mainly associated with the development of society and urban lifestyle, which takes considerable time. In contrast, Soviet urbanization was accelerated and accompanied by the development of new industrial cities, with many urban settlements being created “from scratch” and many being administratively transformed from villages into towns. Some scholars (e.g., SOJA 2010; BRENNER and SCHMID 2012) argue that in the capitalist society, “urban lifestyle” transcended physical limits of the city, but in the Soviet one, the situation was quite the opposite. When rural settlements were assigned urban status, it did not significantly affect the population’s lifestyle, which remained rural and corresponded to low living standards such as poor quality of roads, housing, and utilities. This trend resulted in the appearance of the so-called “embryo-cities” or underdeveloped urbanization (LAPPO 2012). Thus, the difference between rural and urban settlements was indistinct, but not because urbanization extended its influence to rural areas, on the contrary, because rural areas were administratively converted into urban, or because new industrial cities, which were created on greenfield land, did not have enough time to adopt the urban lifestyle.

Despite the above-mentioned feature of Soviet urbanization, it should be pointed out that concurrently it was quite diverse. The Soviet regime crafted its city system by merging Soviet republics, which were not only on different stages of socio-economic development but also had different levels of urbanization. The Soviet system of cities can be seen as a settlement system, which is defined as “the territorial

### Number of urban settlements: 1947 to 1989

	Number of cities and urban-type settlements				Absolute growth/decline	
	1947		1989			
	cities	urban-type settlements	cities	urban-type settlements	cities	urban-type settlements
USSR	1 380	1 982	2 190	4 026	810	2 044
Russia	732	1 033	1 037	2 193	305	1 160
Ukraine	258	451	434	927	176	476
Belarus	66	114	99	112	33	-2
Uzbekistan	27	31	124	97	97	66
Kazakhstan	36	110	84	210	48	100
Georgia	31	9	62	52	31	43
Azerbaijan	29	84	65	122	36	38
Lithuania	54	7	92	22	38	15
Moldavia	14	11	21	49	7	38
Latvia	58	17	56	37	-2	20
Kirgizstan	12	15	21	29	9	14
Tajikistan	7	28	19	48	12	20
Armenia	11	9	27	31	16	22
Turkmenistan	12	45	16	74	4	29
Estonia	33	18	33	23	0	5

Source: Gosstat. USSR. Administrative-territorial division of Soviet Republics 1947; BOLDIREV 1990

Tab. 1: Number of urban settlements: 1947 to 1989

integrity of human settlements between which there is a distribution of functions which entails communication” (GLEZER et al. 2014, p. 82). The purpose of this integrated system was to meet the targets of the Soviet plans of rapid industrialization and to make the country economically autonomous from the rest of the world.

Socialist ideology sought to eliminate class inequality, which included the spatial dimension. Urbanization experience of Soviet Republics, however, differed significantly in that period. Firstly, the Republics had different baselines at the beginning of the Soviet urbanization agenda. For example, in 1926, the urbanization rate in Kazakhstan was 8.6 %; in Russia – 17.7 %; in Uzbekistan – 21.9 %; in Georgia – 22.2 %; while, for example, in Azerbaijan it was 28.1 %. The speed of urbanization in Soviet Republics also varied. Kazakhstan made a giant leap, reaching the rate of 57.2 % at the end of the Soviet period. On the contrary, Uzbekistan demonstrated relatively modest progress

in this respect, as its urbanization rate reached only 41 % in 1989. Consequently, at the end of the Soviet era, the Republics had reached different urbanization rates. The most urbanized Soviet Republic was Russia with the level of urbanization of 73.6 %. The states of the Eastern European part of the USSR had managed to transform into highly urbanized countries with the level of urbanization exceeding 65 % (Moldova is an exception from this pattern, with only 46.9 %). Central Asian states predominantly remained agrarian countries, although at the beginning of the Soviet period they had very different urbanization rates, except for Kazakhstan. Among Caucasian countries, Armenia made a significant achievement, with its urbanization rate growing from 15.6 % to 67.8 % in 1926 and 1989 respectively. The growth of the urbanization rate in Soviet time is explained not only by rural-urban migration but also by significant expansion of national city systems. The analysis of the urbanization dynamic across Soviet



### Percentage of total population and urban population living in national capitals

	Percentage of total population [%]				Percentage of urban population [%]			
	1926	1939	1979	1989	1926	1939	1979	1989
Moscow	2.2	4.2	5.8	5.9	12.6	12.5	8.3	8.1
St. Petersburg	1.9	3.1	3.3	3.0	10.6	9.4	4.8	4.1
Kiev	1.7	2.1	4.3	5.0	9.1	6.3	7.0	7.5
Baku	19.6	24.1	25.7	25.0	69.7	66.8	48.4	46.5
Tashkent	6.8	8.8	11.6	10.4	31.0	37.8	33.8	31.0
Minsk	2.6	2.7	13.2	15.6	15.6	12.8	24.0	23.8
Almaty	0.7	3.7	6.2	6.8	8.5	13.1	11.5	11.9
Tbilisi	11.0	14.7	21.3	23.1	49.5	48.7	41.0	41.5
Erevan	7.4	15.9	33.6	36.6	47.4	49.0	51.1	54.0
Bishkek	3.7	6.4	15.1	14.4	30.3	34.3	39.0	37.5
Dushanbe	0.6	5.6	13.0	11.7	5.7	33.1	37.3	35.8
Kishinev	No data	4.6	12.7	15.4	No data	34.1	32.4	32.7
Riga	No data	18.5	33.1	34.1	No data	52.5	48.4	48.0
Vilnius	No data	7.5	14.2	15.8	No data	32.6	23.3	23.2
Tallinn	No data	15.2	29.3	30.6	No data	45.1	42.1	42.8
Ashgabat	5.2	10.1	11.3	11.3	38.0	30.4	23.6	25.0

Source: Gosstat. Population of the USSR 1973; Gosstat. Population of the USSR 1988; BOLDIREV 1990

Tab. 2: Percentage of total population and urban population living in national capitals

Republics revealed that the construction of new cities followed distinct patterns (refer to Tab. 1). For example, between 1947 and 1989, in Turkmenistan, only four new cities were founded, while in Uzbekistan, 97. The emergence of new cities, however, did not contribute much to the general level of urbanization in this country. Surprisingly, in the Latvian Republic, the total number of cities decreased while in Lithuania it rose significantly. Unfortunately, it is impossible to determine how many cities were actually transformed from villages into towns to increase the official urbanization rate. Nevertheless, in the certain period, these cities were “socialist” cities, which requires further conceptualization within the field of urban studies.

The official Soviet doctrine for spatial development sought to achieve a more uniform and even distribution of cities across the national space. This doctrine also emphasized the need to eliminate the socioeconomic discrepancy between the living standards of the urban and rural

population, the old and new industrial regions (BARANOV and BELOUSOV 1976; ENGEL 2006). When put into practice, this doctrine resulted in stimulation the growth of certain industrial centres in Siberia, Far East, and Central Asia at the expense of others (MARKEVICH and MICHAILOVA 2013). For example, the population of Magnitogorsk between 1931 and 1991 grew almost six times from 64,150 to 440,321 people; the population of Novosibirsk in the same period grew eight times (GOSSTAT 1973; BOLDIREV 1990). If we compare these data with Odessa, for example, which had a strategic location and was the most significant port city of the Russian Empire, then we shall see that between 1939 and 1989 its population less than doubled (GOSSTAT 1973; BOLDIREV 1990). Vladivostok, which was the gateway to the Asia-Pacific region, was transformed into a closed city, whose population growth was not as significant as it could have been expected from the port-city of the country with developing economy (MARKEVICH and MICHAILOVA 2013).

Apart from the socialist ideology, another instrument of space equalization was the regulation of the city size by controlling the population movement (SJÖBERG 1999). For example, the growth of capital cities was controlled by “*propiska*” (registration) institution, which, however, did not prevent the population from migrating to capital cities (refer to Tab. 2). The Soviet period saw a considerable increase in the population in such cities as Minsk, Erevan, and Dushanbe. On the other hand, redistribution of the population due to the extension of the city system resulted in the decrease in the number of urban population in such capitals as Kiev, Tbilisi, and Ashgabat. The different dynamic in the growth of capital cities and the concentration of urban population reflects various urbanization lines.

Urbanization in the Soviet Republics followed the paths which were seemingly convergent but in fact differed significantly, which shows the diversity of Soviet urbanization patterns. It is commonly assumed that the Soviet ideology was aimed at the creation of the egalitarian space (GOLUBCHIKOV 2016). However, as SJÖBERG noted, ideology and development driven by the political priorities were tightly intertwined with the economics of shortage (SJÖBERG 1999). The reality was far more complex than the government’s socialist ambitions and plans. The diversity of internal patterns urbanization adopted shows the discrepancy between the hopes and aspirations of socialism and the practical implementation of these ideas. These facts mean that we need to be more precise and accurate in the discussion of the results of the Soviet ideology aimed to assemble the egalitarian space as so far, urban studies have only demonstrated a rather selective understanding of the complex mosaic of Soviet urbanization.

### Varieties of post-Soviet urbanization

The collapse of the USSR interrupted the evolution of socialism and, as a consequence, further socio-economic development of its space. With the disintegration



of the Soviet Union, fifteen new independent countries emerged on the place of one. Apart from their common ideological, political, economic and cultural legacy, the new independent states have shared the integrated system of cities, which was significantly expanded across all republics to meet the goals pursued by the USSR. Given the new reality, the former Soviet cities became “atomized in their struggle to survive” (GOLUBCHIKOV 2006, p. 478) and had to find their own path for the development in an age of globalization.

In an attempt to uncover the general and particular in post-Soviet patterns of urbanization and moreover to conflate it with the varieties of Soviet urbanization described above I would briefly address the following issues. Firstly, I will take a look at the regularities of urbanization paths of former Soviet states during the last decades. Secondly, I point out the similar pattern in the development of city systems at the national level of FSU states. Thirdly, I look over the issue of the integration of former Soviet cities into the world economy.

The transition to capitalism in many FSU states started from deurbanization (decreasing urbanization rates) or stagnation of urbanization. The artificially accelerated growth of urbanization under the communist regime had been disrupted in the post-Soviet time. The urbanization rate of many FSU states in 2000 was lower than in 1989–1991. For example, in 2001 the urbanization rate in Armenia was 64.6 %, while in 1989 it was 67.8 %. The urbanization rate in Uzbekistan fell from 41.0 % to 37.4 % in 1989 and 2000 respectively. In Tajikistan urbanization rate declined from 32.6 % in 1989 to 22.6 % in 2000. Reviewing the dynamic of urbanization rate in 1989–2017 one can observe the distinct development trajectories among FSU states. For example, the urbanization rates of such countries as Russia and Ukraine remain relatively stable. The urbanization rate of Uzbekistan continued to decline, falling to 35.8 % in 2008. However, in 2009 966 rural Uzbek settlements with the population around four million people were administratively

converted to cities, as a consequence, the level of national urbanization rose sharply to 51.7 %. The urbanization rates in other post-Soviet countries follow very variable trajectories including both upward and downward trends. At the beginning of 2017 around the half of FSU states had approximately the same urbanization rate as in 1991. Belarus is the only FSU states presents the constant growth of urbanization rate since 1991. As at January 2017, the urbanization rate of Belarus was 78.1 %. At present, it is the most urbanized country in the post-Soviet space.

According to MURRAY and SZELENEY (1984), the transition to socialism in many countries started from deurbanization. The review of trends of post-Soviet urbanization has shown that transition to capitalism was also accompanied by deurbanization. Thus, deurbanization can be seen as an evolutionary phase of the transition (a regime change). The interrelation between various factors influencing the urbanization level in post-Soviet countries merits special consideration. Deurbanization of FSU states has a complex nature. On the one hand, it had naturally resulted from the rapid Soviet urbanization, when rural settlements were transformed to urban to meet the requirements of five-year plans. On the other hand, deurbanization of FSU states is a consequence of de-industrialization of many FSU states and the deep socio-economic crisis presented in demographic changes and migration flows after the USSR collapse. In the context of post-Soviet urbanization, one can assume that deurbanization is deeply intertwined with the post-Soviet administrative reforms when small cities and urban settlements were given back their administrative status of rural settlement due to the population decline, the decreasing heterogeneity of urban economy, and the underdeveloped service function. Nevertheless, the FSU states present very diverse development paths (e.g., Uzbekistan and Belarus) which are not studied so far from the comparative perspectives.

Another striking spatial pattern of post-Soviet urban transformation is space

polarization, which means continuous growth of capitals (regarding the population and power) and some big cities combined with a significant decline of the rest (NEFEDOVA et al. 2016). National capitals are among the most dynamic and prosperous cities in the post-Soviet space. These cities get a “lion’s share” of the national welfare, they also serve as primary transport hubs and attract migration, knowledge and capital flows, thus becoming focal points of the post-Soviet space. ZUBAREVICH (2017), however, compared various socio-economic indicators of former Soviet capital cities in the last decades and found that the capital cities of FSU states follow highly diverse development paths, which could be explained by the level of national development, national institutions, the degree of urbanization, and the size of the country (ZUBAREVICH 2017).

The growth of post-Soviet capitals is accompanied by a remarkable shrinkage of many other cities. For example, 83 % of Ukrainian and 60 % of Belarusian cities lost a part of their population in the period from 1991 to 2013 (NEFEDOVA et al. 2016). 85 % of Georgian cities lost their population in the period from 1989 to 2014 (GEOSTAT, 2016). Urban shrinkage is a widely spread phenomenon among many post-socialist countries, and it is often interpreted as a more or less direct response to the political and economic changes (MYKHENKO and TUROK 2008). However, the shrinking cities show very different development trajectories in the post-Soviet space, although contemporary urban theory has yet failed to sufficiently explain how and why these trajectories occur (HAASE et al. 2016).

The urban shrinkage of many post-Soviet cities can to some extent be explained by the inability of the cities that used to belong to the closed Soviet economy to integrate into global economic networks. As some authors note, the development of FSU states, including urban development, is predetermined by their capacity to integrate into global economic chains (GOLUBCHIKOV and Badyina 2016). During the communist regime, the cities

were integrated into the unified settlement system, which was relatively isolated from the rest of the world. After the disintegration of the USSR, post-Soviet cities started to penetrate into the global economy and to search for their places in the world urban hierarchy. As a result, a significant number of cities, which urban economic bases were oriented for the planned economy, got lost in the new reality. However, not only mono-industrial or small cities faced difficulties in the globalizing world. Big cities, as well as capital cities, are now struggling for the position within the world urban hierarchy. Undoubtedly, Moscow, which was the “core” not only of the Soviet but also of the “socialist empire,” dominates the post-Soviet space and it is rated as an alpha-city in the world urban hierarchy (TAYLOR et al. 2011). Other post-Soviet cities occupy much more modest positions. As of 2016, only fourteen former Soviet cities had a sufficiently high level of integration into the world city network (WCN) proposed by the Globalization and World Cities research network (GaWC; <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/gawc>). Almost all cities on this list are capital cities, except for Almaty and St Petersburg. Analyzing the dynamic of post-Soviet cities from 2000 to 2016, one can observe their gradual integration into the world economy. Eight post-Soviet cities had sufficient level of integration into the world economy in 2000 and fourteen cities in 2016. The different development paths these cities take are reflected in their position in the WCN: some cities, such as Moscow and Kiev, have been improving their relative positions while others have shown little progress. However, the analysis of integration of post-Soviet cities in the world economy shows that, since the collapse of the USSR, the formerly united system of cities has come to be perceived as a geographically “chaotic” conception, when relatively unrelated areas are united within a single framework (DERUDDER et al. 2007).

After the end of socialism, the implemented Soviet urban agenda created a particular kind of testing laboratory in which cities faced a range of quantitative

and qualitative changes in their socio-economic and political environment. The post-industrial shift was caused by the integration of a resource-oriented economy with the global economy, which made cities more diverse and led them to take various development paths, establishing new inter-urban connections both in national and the world economies.

### **How the varieties of Soviet and post-Soviet urbanization contribute to urban theory**

The post-socialist urban agenda has emerged as an attempt to assess critically and to conceptualize those urban practices that appeared in the course of the transition from socialism to capitalism, which involved multiple institutional, social, and urban transformations (SÝKORA and BOUZAROVSKI 2012). The post-socialist urban experience is currently referred to as “urbanization of transition” (GOLUBCHIKOV 2016). Thus, post-socialist cities’ shared socialist legacy and the transition period that followed serve as the main departure point for their conceptualisation (HIRT 2013; TUVIKENE 2016; SÝKORA and BOUZAROVSKI 2011; GOLUBCHIKOV et al. 2014; GOLUBCHIKOV 2016). At the same time, contemporary post-socialist urban studies tend to overlook the problem of the socialist past and the same somewhat superficial approach is applied to socialist cities and socialist urbanization (FERENCÚHOVA 2016). Moreover, taking into account the power of selective perception, the question arises as to whether we know the socialist past well enough and whether we can fully estimate its potential influence on the post-socialist reality. Urbanization of post-Soviet space occupies a separate place in the contemporary post-socialist urban studies largely due to the fact that the USSR had the longest history of socialism and the first socialist cities created under the Soviet regime followed diverse urbanization paths in their development. This unique phenomenon, therefore, provides us with possibilities to form “a new conceptual lexicon identifying the variety of urbanization processes”, which are the part and the parcel of the

contemporary urban world (BRENNER and SCHMID 2012).

The analysis of the Soviet urban statistics shows that despite the prevailing view that these cities shared one past, this past was far from being homogeneous and their urbanization patterns varied significantly. Although urban development was guided by the same ideology and the same central planning policy aimed at more uniform even distribution of cities across the space, in different Republics it took different paths, which led to different outcomes. In the post-Soviet time, FSU states continue to pursue their own urbanization paths, with many of them facing the problem of spatial polarization in favour of capital cities. It is a well-known fact that uneven urban development is not a phenomenon of socialism or post-socialism it is the basis of capitalism, that every single city follows unique development path, that some cities are more prosperous than others. Therefore, what deserves special attention is whether there exists a fundamental difference between (post)socialist and capitalist urbanization? (HIRT et al. 2016). As some authors argue, in the Soviet period there was no developed theory of urbanization as such. CASTELLS (1977) maintained that the pattern of urbanization under socialism could not be explained because there is no theory of the socialist mode of production (from MURRAY and SZELENEY 1981, p. 92). What is essential in the context of post-socialist urban studies is that, as Annegret HAASE and her colleagues point out, these studies are in need of more in-depth, inductive reasoning rather than deductive applications of the existing capitalist theories (HAASE et al. 2016).

Trying to conceptualize and generalize urban practices in Soviet and post-Soviet context, urban scholars often approach capital cities as icons of multidimensional transformation (e.g. SALUKVADZE and GOLUBCHIKOV 2016; TUVIKENE 2016; BRADE and RUDOLPH 2004), thus leaving out those cities that emerged as a result of “the internal colonization of (Soviet) space” (TRUBINA 2017, p. 24). It is important to consider the nature of these

cities since it will enable us to evaluate the patterns of (post)Soviet urbanization, its cost and significance. Some researchers believe that it was a significant step towards creating a modern industrial country and that without the construction of new cities it would have been impossible to develop Soviet industry and achieve the necessary performance level (LAPPO 2012). Others, however, see Soviet urbanization as a failure of the Soviet regime, pointing out that it was incoherent and inefficient. For example, Yuriy PIVOVAROV contends that Soviet urbanization was a by-product of industrialization; Sergey DUHANOV shows the pitfalls of central planning when applied to urbanization; while Mikhail ILCHENKO sees Soviet cities as an “unfinished project” (PIVOVAROV 2001; DUHANOV 2017; ILCHENKO 2017). Not surprisingly, there is much controversy in the way the results of Soviet urbanization are evaluated, partially due to the lack of reliable urban data both in Soviet and post-Soviet time; the positivist approach of Soviet/post-Soviet scientific schools; and biased views on the Soviet regime. Nevertheless, the centrally planned extension of the Soviet urban system is one of the long-lasting effects of the Soviet project, which is not sufficiently explored.

To conceptualize post-Soviet urban experience, I shall distinguish between two groups of cities – socialist cities in their “pure” form and “cities of permanent transition”. This division can also be applied to the post-socialist space. “Pure” socialist cities were the result of centrally planned, accelerated industrialisation; they were built to increase the economic and military power of the state. These cities played an important ideological role in the Soviet economic model and in the transition period underwent tremendous transformations, which negatively affected the urban economic base and caused depopulation. “Cities of permanent transition” had a pre-socialist history; they experienced the transition to socialism and afterward transitioned back to capitalism. Therefore, the impact of transition processes on these cities was

less visible than in the first group of cities. Transition processes affected these two groups of cities to a different degree. Nevertheless, contemporary studies tend to take for granted the hypothesis that cities were equally affected by the socialist regime, thus neglecting this distinctive aspect of socialist urbanization. Moreover, speaking about these two groups of cities, it would also be productive to consider how divergent and convergent social relations, economic practices, and governance practices will evolve within and between them. The post-socialist urban landscape and its variations present a peculiar spatial phenomenon, which can provide us with a better understanding of contemporary urbanization processes.

In the light of the above, the need for comparative empirical research is quite obvious: it would be productive to compare not only post-socialist and capitalist cities, but, what is even more critical, cities in the post-socialist space and the diverse urban experiences they had despite the common political regime. The urban socialist past is constructed not only by similarities of the socialist regime but primarily by multiple differences of pre-socialist legacies and post-socialist circumstances, modes of transition to capitalism. Therefore, cities with the socialist past can serve as a unique laboratory for focused comparison of urban practices and for discovering the mosaic of urban space shaped by mixed either political or ideological regimes. I agree with the scholars who advocate the need to apply “more individualizing, holistic and inclusive comparative perspectives that are gaining importance in the context of socio-theoretical conceptions” (WIEST 2012, p. 843). This paper argues for more nuanced and detailed analysis of (post)Soviet urbanization in contrast to the commonly established view on this space as essentially homogeneous and implicitly similar to that of Central and Eastern Europe. Thus, it is important to emphasize that, unlike urbanization in FSU states, (post)socialist urbanization in CEE states (“forgotten part of the west” (STENNING and HÖRSCHELMANN 2008))

was characterized by a stronger influence of the pre-socialist stage of urbanization and faster convergence with capitalist patterns of urbanization.

A city with the socialist past, like any other city, is “never complete and thus never entirely different from its predecessors” (BEAUREGARD and HAILA, 1997, p. 327). However, to understand the nature of these cities, we need to reconsider their position in urban studies and their potential contribution to urban theory. The socialist and post-socialist urban experience is significant for urban studies and urban theory (TRUBINA 2017, p. 36). However, analysis of Soviet and post-Soviet urbanization in its ideological experimentation intertwined with the daily practice and new ontology of the urban calls for the major reconceptualization of meta-narrative underlying current urban debates (GOLUBCHIKOV 2016).

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**Резюме**

ИРИНА ФРОСТ

**Разнообразие (пост)советской Урбанизации: Выявление Общего и Частного в Постсоциалистический Городских Исследованиях**

Исследования развития городов в условиях постсоциалистической реальности направлены, как на (ре)концептуализацию самого понятия «постсоциалистический город», так и на необходимость переосмысления процессов городского развития, происходящих в условиях смены политического и экономического режимов. Параллельно с этим, в современных городских исследованиях признана необходимость формирования комплексной теории развития городов, которая сможет учитывать все разнообразие процессов, происходящих в урбанизированном мире. Постсоциалистические города, как потенциальные источники для теоретизации городского развития, рассматриваются относительно редко, более того их роль и место в современных городских исследованиях является объектом критики. Принимая постсоциалистические городские исследования, как одно из направлений городских исследований, в статье обосновывается необходимость детального (детализированного) анализа данных городов. Для этого предлагается, во-первых, уделять больше внимания историческому контексту развития данных городов при их изучении, во-вторых, проводить сравнительный анализ городских процессов внутри данной группы. С учетом выше изложенного, цель статьи – критически проанализировать советский опыт урбанизации пространства и его влияние на развитие городов в постсоветских странах. Урбанизация СССР, с одной стороны, может быть рассмотрена, как долгосрочный крупномасштабный проект, реализованный в рамках социалистической идеологии, и оказавший значительное влияние на траекторию урбанизации постсоветского пространства. С другой стороны, в статье аргументируется, что, несмотря на свой централизованный подход, реализация данного проекта была крайне неоднородна (неравномерна) по территории страны и, как следствие, результаты советской урбанизации в постсоветский период по-разному проявляются в странах бывшего СССР. Города постсоветского пространства представляют уникальную базу для проведения сравнительных исследований городов, развитие которых происходило под влиянием различных режимов. В статье автор предлагает выйти за рамки рассмотрения процессов урбанизации советского пространства, как эгалитарного. Выявление разнообразия траекторий городского развития внутри постсоветского пространства представляет уникальную возможность для разработки современной урбанистической терминологии и теоретизации современных городских исследований.

*Урбанизация; социализм; постсоциализм; СССР, городская теория; социалистический город*

**Résumé**

IRINA FROST

**Exploration des variétés d'urbanisation (post-)soviétique: rapprochement entre le général et le particulier dans les études urbaines post-socialistes**

Les études urbaines qui ont été réalisées dans le contexte post-socialiste cherchent à réévaluer la notion même de la ville post-socialiste et à reconceptualiser ses pratiques urbaines à la suite du changement de régime et d'un mode de production économique. Même si l'on reconnaît la nécessité d'élaborer une théorie urbaine dans des directions plus cohérentes mais, en même temps, multipolaires et comparatives, les villes ayant un passé socialiste à titre de source potentielle de théorisation de l'urbanité sont cependant mal prises en compte. Cet article plaide pour une analyse plus nuancée et plus détaillée des modes et formes d'urbanisation (post-)socialistes, en voyant dans les études urbaines post-socialistes un domaine de recherche multidimensionnel. Le mode d'action peut consister premièrement à réaliser une étude soignée du contexte historique et, deuxièmement, à conduire une analyse comparative des villes post-socialistes. Placé dans ce contexte, cet article vise à problématiser l'expérience d'urbanisation faite au cours de la période soviétique, à titre de projet de l'idéologie socialiste à grande échelle et à long terme, qui a des conséquences considérables pour les modèles d'urbanisation longtemps après la chute de l'URSS. Il est toutefois inexact de considérer l'urbanisation soviétique comme homogène, et ses résultats comme étant uniformes et monolithiques. Les villes (post-)soviétiques offrent une substance riche et judicieuse pour l'étude comparative des modèles urbains post-socialistes et, à la fois, des expériences urbaines, dans le contexte de l'affrontement des tendances capitalistes et des tendances post-socialistes. Cet article invite à aller au-delà de l'hypothèse relative au paysage égalitaire de la géographie économique en tant qu'idéologie spatiale du régime soviétique, et à faire des recherches sur les variétés d'urbanisation post-soviétique nous apportant une précieuse opportunité d'élaborer un nouveau vocabulaire conceptuel pour l'analyse de différents processus d'urbanisation.

*URSS; urbanisation; socialisme; post-socialisme; théorie urbaine; ville socialiste*